



## City of Middletown

Testimony Governor's Bill 6664 – **Support**  
An Act Managing Waste and Creating a Waste Authority  
**Environment Committee Public Hearing – Monday, February 27, 2023**

**To:** Honored Co-Chairs, Sen. Lopes and Rep. Gresko, and distinguished Members of the Environment Committee:

*The City of Middletown appreciates the opportunity to provide comments supporting the Governor's Bill, 6664, An Act Managing Waste and Creating a Waste Authority.*

My name is Kim O'Rourke and I am the Recycling Coordinator for the City of Middletown. I have worked in this position for over thirty years and have extensive experience with municipal waste disposal, recycling, diversion and reduction programs. I am especially familiar with the challenges of municipal government trying to manage different segments of the waste stream and educating the public with limited resources.

It is vital that Connecticut improve its system for managing waste materials. With the closing of the Hartford MIRA facility, more waste than ever is being transported out of state. This puts our communities at the mercy of other state regulations and their fees. Costs are escalating. Recycling rates are stagnant. There is no solid plan for the future and the current system is not sustainable.

We are at a crossroads. We have been here before. The management of trash always changes and adjusts. We no longer throw trash in the streets or leave it in pits in the ground. More recently, in the late 80's with the impending closure of landfills, the State created diversion through a mandatory recycling program. In the 90's the collection system primarily switched from dual stream bins to single stream carts. It is always evolving.

*Now, 32 years after the mandatory recycling program started, we need to take the next step.*

Recycling is not trash. It is a commodity. A material that is used to make something new. Municipalities are not set up to be in this business. It made sense to set up the system as we did in the early 90's, but 30 years later we have the experience to show municipalities can only take it so far. We have done what we can. We don't have the resources to manage this material, this commodity, effectively. It is time to move this system to the next level, to get a stable funding base, increase our recycling rates, improve transparency and make the producers of these products financially responsible and accountable.

### **Please hear our story of why this is so important.**

**Blind Budgeting. Costs skyrocketing.** In Middletown, the recycling cost is tied to a monthly market index. Because of the fluctuating recycling markets, it is impossible to plan a municipal recycling budget.

This fiscal year the City added funding to the recycling tip fee line item, but that budget is already 90% spent because of the increased processing costs and volatile markets. It is a total guessing game. Costs have been escalating over the past few years, but recently costs have skyrocketed. **Middletown is currently paying more to recycle than dispose of trash.** The tip fee went from \$0 in 2016 to over \$100 in 2023. Recycling is not free. Someone has to pay. But is it fair to have this cost of collecting and processing this material on the backs of municipalities or with the producers, who are making profits off of this material? Municipalities have no input into what type of packaging is introduced to the market, yet, we are required to manage it in a responsible way – and this is getting more and more complicated and expensive.

For your information, I have attached the history of the City's recycling tip fee costs for the past six years. This tip fee is determined by an Average Commodity Rate (ACR) dictated by the facility. It is important to note that the processing costs, residue rates, and contamination costs have all increased and are the City's biggest burden. With our current system, none of this will improve.

If Packaging EPR were implemented in CT, the City would have more stability in budgeting, and the bulk, if not all, of the costs would be paid by the producers. We estimate this program would save the City more than \$250,000 and some of that funding could be used to support other important city services.

**Packaging EPR does not raise costs for consumers.** [A study](#) commissioned by the Oregon DEQ and conducted by Resource Recycling Systems analyzed prices before and after EPR legislation passed in Canada and found no evidence that prices increased. In Europe, where programs have been in operation for more than three decades, prices have remained stable. Despite the false claims about price increases, 4 states have passed packaging EPR and many more will follow. Canadian provinces are all moving toward full producer responsibility. Remember, we are only talking about the packaging and paper, not the product, and it would be spread out among hundreds of thousands of packages.

Under the current recycling system, consumers have no choice. Everyone generates waste and everyone pays directly or indirectly through municipal taxes or fees or private subscription. Shifting costs to the producers, will give consumers more of a choice. Do you want to purchase single use water bottles or use a reusable one? Do you want to purchase plastic bottles of laundry detergent or use the refill option? Do you want to purchase a big bag of chips or a bunch of little bags? EPR will not only help municipalities control costs, but also give consumers more control.

**Packaging EPR will increase recycling rates.** A recent [study by the Recycling Partnership](#) demonstrated that states implementing EPR for Packaging and Paper can expect an increase in recycling rates. This increase is due to collecting more of the materials we currently accept and expanding the list of materials than can be recycled. This study also showed that retail prices don't go up due to EPR.

## **Other important benefits of Packaging EPR**

**EPR will improve public education.** This is critical. Recycling is confusing. Municipalities do not have the resources to educate residents effectively. Middletown provides a recycling education budget of \$2000. This and free promotion only takes us so far. Consistent and better education provided by the stewardship organization will lead to more participation and higher quality recycling.

Contamination is Middletown's biggest burden. More consistent, statewide education will help reduce the amount of wrong materials put in recycling carts.

RecycleCT provides a universal list for recycling and resources for municipalities, but they also are lacking resources and their impact is limited. Messaging is confusing all around.

- The processing facility in Berlin does not use the RecycleCt guidelines when providing information to municipalities and haulers using their facility. The guidelines are slightly different.
- Producers mislabel their packaging and have little concern for the specific requirements in CT.

Who can blame residents for being confused? The messages coming from producers, towns and the solid waste industry are all different.

An EPR program will require and incentivize producers to elevate outreach efforts statewide. The producers have the resources to implement a highly visible public education campaign which could include radio ads, television commercials, outreach through retail establishments and more reliable labeling of products. This comprehensive public education coupled with municipal efforts and a more consistent message, will help increase recycling and reduce contamination. These efforts have been successful with our current mattress and paint EPR programs and have been proven in other countries with EPR programs.

**Waste has changed** significantly over the last thirty years. The composition used to be simpler. Consumer packaging is much more complex, there are many more single use items, and even if one is motivated, it is really hard to decrease individual waste because of what is being sold. Residents often contact me about whether something is recyclable, and I have no knowledge of what they are talking about because it is something new on the market. Sometimes packaging contains not only the recycling arrows (which are confusing and misleading) but also statements such as “recyclable with your curbside recycling”, yet is not accepted with our recycling and I have to explain to those who go out of their way to contact me that that packaging is probably recyclable somewhere, but not here.

*Municipalities have no input as to what is put into the waste stream, yet we are required to manage it, pay for it, and explain it.*

A producer responsibility program will address many of the challenges of the changing nature of packaging.

**Municipalities will have a choice.** Under this bill towns have choices. If they do not feel comfortable or don't understand the program they can choose not to join. Others can decide whether to continue their program and get reimbursed or participate fully in the stewardship program. Passage of this bill maintains municipalities right to choose to participate.

*Please allow the towns that need the relief and want to have manufacturers pay for recycling to have that choice.*

**EPR will improve recycling at multifamily complexes and public space recycling.** I am very excited about this part. Municipal officials have struggled with improving recycling at multifamily and public spaces for decades. There's numerous challenges. Bringing in the resources of the producers will help improve the recycling in these areas and increase quality and quantity.

**Recycling is a fractured system.** There is a lack of coordination/communication between producers, processors, haulers and municipal governments. We don't talk to each other. EPR will require more

communication between stakeholders and bring the producers into the conversation, leading to more cohesion, better messaging, more transparency and accountability and a fairer, more sustainable system.

**Producers will be incentivized to design better packaging.** Through a system called eco-modulation manufacturers will be incentivized to develop more sustainable and recyclable packaging.

### Comments on Organics and Solid Waste Assessment Sections

I agree with the concepts of the organics section and solid waste assessment of the bill. It is important to expand organics diversion programs and offer options for residents; it is important to have stable funding. However, both of these programs will cost municipalities money. **Neither of these concepts should be passed without passing EPR for packaging.** Municipalities cannot absorb the cost of an increase in solid waste disposal without the savings from an EPR program.

In conclusion, recycling costs money. Manufacturers are willing to pay for recycling programs. Other states and countries have taken this step and it's time for Connecticut to embrace the future of recycling.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kim O'Rourke

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### Middletown's Mixed Recycling Rate per ton - **Payment**/Reimbursement 2016-2023

Month	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
July	0	0	\$44.93	\$44.92	\$62.75	\$82.76	\$15.20	\$41.18
Aug	0	0	\$44.92	\$44.92	\$66.30	\$81.68	\$2.11	\$68.15
Sept	0	0	\$45.37	\$45.37	\$65.40	\$77.41	\$6.85	\$88.70
Oct	0	0	\$45.27	\$45.27	\$64.03	\$72.73	\$5.25	\$99.98
Nov	0	0	\$44.92	\$44.92	\$63.10	\$69.44	\$5.65	\$98.13
Dec	0	0	\$45.78	\$45.78	\$61.94	\$65.65	\$22.60	\$97.41
Jan	0	\$24.38	\$47.14	\$47.14	\$86.52	\$64.38	\$41.70	\$100.54
Feb	0	\$24.24	\$52.63	\$53	\$88.53	\$61.95	\$39.28	
Mar	0	\$29.65	\$54.17	\$54.17	\$90.06	\$59.15	\$31.95	
Apr	0	\$37.67	\$59.63	\$59.63	\$84.54	\$51.64	\$28.78	
May	0	\$44.73	\$61.25	\$61.25	\$74.67	\$48.90	\$27.44	
June	0	\$44.78	\$67.42	\$62.25	\$79.28	\$42.00	\$31.22	